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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000066

SIPDIS

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TAGS: MARR PREL MOPS EZ I2

SUBJECT: DSACEUR LETTER ON NTM PAVES WAY FOR CZECH GOVERNMENT TO SEEK PARLIAMENTARY MANDATE FOR CONTINUED CZECH DEPLOYMENT IN SOUTHERN IRAQ

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Mark Canning for reasons 1.4
(B/D)

¶1. (C) According to President Klaus' office, the Czech government in its weekly cabinet session on January 12 decided to seek a parliamentary mandate for the continued deployment of the Czech company of MPs in southern Iraq. The MOD was charged with preparing the draft for presentation to parliament, perhaps as early as the week of January 17 in a special parliamentary session. The mandate will provide for the Czech unit to continue under MNF for now, but switch over to NTM when NTM Phase III starts later in the year. We understand that the mandate is to provide for deployment until the end of February 2006. A DSACEUR letter that same day to FM Svoboda and MOD Kuehnl contained explicit assurances that the Czech contingent would be included under NTM when Phase III begins later this year, according to an informed Czech diplomat and the British Embassy, citing MOD sources.

¶2. (C) MFA Deputy Director for Security Policy, Vaclav Balek, also told Poloff on January 12 that DSACEUR's letter, which Balek had read, indicated that the Czech military police now conducting training in Basra as part of the MNF, could continue the same mission in the same place as part of NATO's training mission in Iraq, once Phase III begins later this year. Even though no specific date was given for the start of Phase III, the signal was sufficient for PM Gross' Government to take a decision to seek parliament's approval for a mandate extension.

¶3. (C) Balek said that the government will argue that participation in the NATO mission is an important long-term national goal and that a temporary extension of the mission under MFN should not prevent them from achieving their goal. The government will also argue that it will cost much more to temporarily close the mission in Basra and fly everyone home, only to fly them back some months later and reopen the mission. Balek was optimistic that the extension would be passed under these conditions.

¶4. (C) Comment: The current mandate expires on February 28. Although there will be criticism from left-wing CSSD deputies that the Czech unit was not included from the start under NTM, which has UNSCR authorization, the prospects for parliamentary approval now look better than ever.
HILLAS